



Gardens

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-Using the garden planning worksheet-

Step 1: Vision

Knowing where you want to end up is the first step in your gardening journey. There are two questions involved here: What do you want your garden to be in the long term? What do you want your garden to be this season?

The planning worksheet will help you plan out your garden for this season, but having the long-term view of the garden will help you put together this season's plan.

Here are two examples of goals, one for the long-term and one for this season:

Example 1 (future seasons): Grow as much food as possible to eat and preserve.

Example 2 (this season): Grow at least 25 tomato plants of 5 different varieties.

Plants

Once you decide the purpose for growing, decide what you are going to grow. The worksheet makes the distinction between perennials and annuals. Perennial plants grow back year-after-year; they need special consideration when planting because they will lock that area up for multiple seasons. Annuals complete their entire life-cycle in one season. When it comes to future planning, annuals should not be planted in the same spot for multiple years because pest will build up in the soil. By rotating annuals each year, the pest cannot build up in one area over time.

Most vegetables are annuals, such as tomatoes and potatoes. Asparagus is a notable exception. Most berries are perennials. Herbs tend to be perennial, although there are exceptions here as well. Flowers can go either way. The key is to know the life-cycle of each species you are planting and plan your garden to accommodate.

Companion planting is a classic organic gardening method that boosts yields by grouping together species that will grow well together. If you have a favorite vegetable or herb, you should find out what plants help it grow. In the urban landscape, companion planting is essential to get the most out of each square foot.

<http://sites.google.com/site/citymousegardens/services/methods#companionplanting>

Step 2: Assess your space

The grid provided in the worksheet is 36 X 54. Depending on the size of your area, set the scale so that

your entire space fits, but you also get enough detail. (If you are using the HTML based worksheet you can download the grid by right-clicking on it and selecting 'Save Image As'. You can then use editing software to map out your space. You will have to print it separately, however.)

You want to include any factors in your landscape that might influence growing plants. These include: the amount of sunlight available, the slope and any low spots that collect water, tree roots, or sidewalks. For safety, make sure you know where gas and electric lines are buried. **Always call before you dig:**

811. In Minnesota, the number to call is: 1-800-252-1166.

Step 3: Plan the use of your space

The most efficient planting method is to have growing beds. ([More information on growing beds here.](#)) They can range anywhere from 1 square foot to four or five square feet. You want to be able to reach the middle, however, without having to walk in the bed. Growing beds use space more efficiently than row planting. For the urban gardener, space is king. Having specific areas that you plant and specific areas that are paths also protects the soil from compaction. City Mouse Gardens uses beds of various shapes and sizes (usually not more than 4' across though) with a 1½ - 2 ft path running between them. You should plan yours to best fit the landscape and accommodate wheelbarrows or other equipment you may use.

After mapping out where your growing beds will be, determine what plants will go in each bed. The planning worksheet provides space for eight growing beds. Organize your plants from Step 1 into growing beds. Keep in mind the environmental factors from your space assessment. (i.e. Tomatoes like beds in sunny spots.) Use the worksheet to group companion plants together in the same beds.

How you name your beds up to you. ("1","2","3" etc. works fine. As does "tomato", "squash", "bean" etc.)

Maximize production through succession planting: a single growing bed can produce more than one harvest in a season. For example, Bed:1 can be planted with radishes and spinach in April producing an early harvest in May and then replanted to produce a harvest of carrots and peppers in August. You may want to note this on your worksheet as "Bed:1 early" and "Bed: 1 late", or however you would like.

Step 4: Create a calendar for important dates and seasonal trends

Gardening is effectively responding to seasonal change. The last frost of the spring is important to note. The first frost in the fall may be even more important. You also want to know when to start seeds indoors and when to start seeds outdoors, when you should expect certain crops to be ripe, etc. The final page of the planning worksheet helps you but together a rough outline of what chores need to be done when.

Please send any feedback about the City Mouse garden planning worksheet or this user guide to CityMouse.Gardens@gmail.com.